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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1434
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1411
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3499
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1014
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002996

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT HABIBIE ON THE POLITICAL
SITUATION, SUHARTO, DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

REF: 06 JAKARTA 13328

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Classified By: Ambassador Cameron R. Hume, reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met former president B.J. Habibie on October 24. Habibie characterized the current political situation in Indonesia as "confused," expressed a desire to collaborate with the Mission on democracy promotion projects, and shared the details of his last conversation with former president Suharto (in 1998). Habibie praised President Yudhoyono and suggested that the GOI's inability to meet the average Indonesian's basic needs represented the most significant threat to the country's long-term stability, not radical Islam. He plans to visit New York in early 2008.
END SUMMARY.

THE HABIBIE INSTITUTE

¶2. (C) At Habibie's invitation, the Ambassador joined the former president on October 24 for lunch at his residence. Habibie was characteristically energetic and talkative, and eagerly briefed the Ambassador on the Habibie Institute's latest projects. Noting that he founded the think-tank at former President Carter's urging, Habibie fondly recalled the 2001 collaboration between Mission and the Habibie Institute (and the German government) on the Indonesian Constitution project. The former President inquired about the USG's polling work in Indonesia. Habibie then offered that one possible avenue for future collaboration between the USG and the Institute would be to develop the equivalent of a "happiness index" -- a poll that would gauge the average Indonesian's level of satisfaction with democracy, government responsiveness, etc. The Ambassador agreed to consider additional ways to collaborate in the future.

HABIBIE ON DEMOCRACY

¶3. (C) On the subject of the overall health of democracy in Indonesia, Habibie told the Ambassador that the political situation in Indonesia was "confused." While information was readily available, Habibie argued that it was also institutionalized and Indonesians had a hard time making

informed judgments. Habibie noted that he did not like to comment on people as a general rule, but nevertheless felt comfortable telling the Ambassador that he believed current President Yudhoyono was committed to advancing democracy and was "a patriot."

14. (C) In Habibie's estimation, the greatest threat to the future of democracy was not radical Islam -- a force that he labeled "imported" -- but rather the destabilizing potential for a popular movement among the millions of Indonesians who cannot meet their basic needs. The government's inability to reduce poverty and raise the standard of living of impoverished Indonesians could eventually lead to public resentment and a strong popular reaction against the government. Islam, on the other hand, was not at all ideological in Indonesia -- as opposed to in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries -- and most Indonesians separated their faith from their political beliefs. The risk of radical forces ever gaining traction in Indonesia was small in his opinion.

LAST WORDS WITH SUHARTO

15. (C) In response to a question about Habibie's relationship with former president Suharto, Habibie -- noting that the two had not talked since 1998 -- recounted the story of his last conversation with the deposed ex-president. According to Habibie, in the tumultuous first days after Habibie replaced Suharto in May 1998, Habibie made several attempts to reach out to Suharto to repair their relationship and solicit his guidance. Suharto repeatedly rebuffed Habibie's entreaties until June 8 arrived and Habibie could not stand the thought of not talking to Suharto on his birthday -- a tradition since they first met. Habibie ultimately called Suharto's then Chief of Staff -- General Wiranto -- and insisted on wishing Suharto a happy birthday directly. Making no

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promises, Wiranto vowed to try.

16. (C) When Suharto finally came to the phone, Habibie wished him a happy birthday and asked to come see him in person, noting that he was wholly unequipped for the task of running the country and needed Suharto's counsel. Suharto quickly and firmly told Habibie "no" and said for the good of the country the two should never meet again. Suharto then advised Habibie to focus his energies on his job; everything would work out in due time Suharto told him. Suharto closed the conversation by observing that the two were both extremely devout and that he would "remember Habibie in his prayers." With that, Suharto ended the call and they never talked again. Suharto, according to Habibie, was a patriot at heart but had suffered from limited vision. At the end of the day, however, Suharto could have made life very difficult for Habibie and Indonesia. To Suharto's everlasting credit, he had chosen not to do so.

NEW YORK VISIT

17. (C) The lunch closed with Habibie noting that he and his wife will stay in New York on February 2 en route to a cruise on the Queen Mary; Habibie would also stay over in New York at the end of the Caribbean cruise. Habibie told the Ambassador that while he would like his visit to be relatively low profile, he would also be interested in "meeting people" and would welcome any suggestions on how to best make use of his time there. Habibie also said he would be accompanied by two escorts and requested Mission's assistance in facilitating his group's entry into the United States.

HUME